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ABSTRACT

A study examined forensic competitor preference in choosing quotations for analysis in the event of impromptu speaking. Subjects were 62 competitors in one year and 59 competitors in the next year at an invitational tournament at a large midwestern university. The quotations for the tournament were divided into two groups. The first year, subjects chose quotations from "cynical" or "non-cynical" groups of quotations, and the second year, subjects chose from "humorous" or "non-humorous" groups of quotations. Results indicated that: (1) students had a preference in the types of quotations they chose to analyze; (2) topic choice was an indicator of advancement to the final round the first year but not the second year; and (3) no significant differences were found when gender difference was considered a variable for topic choice. Findings suggest that tournament directors should be concerned with the choice of quotations they offer to students. Future research should consider whether quotation length may affect choice. (Ten tables of data are included; 15 references are attached.) (RS)

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Quotational choices in impromptu speaking: A study in student preferences

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Quotational choices in impromptu speaking:

A study of student preferences

Impromptu speaking has evolved from an inconsistent experimental event (Jennings, 1982) into a standardized event that attracts large numbers of competitors at a majority of tournaments (Hawkins, 1989). This event has also become a popular subject of forensics research (Sellnow, 1989). The research tends to be educational (Baus, 1992; Dean & Levasseur, 1989; Endres, 1992; Faules, Rieke & Rhodes, 1976; Klopf, 1982; Roob, 1992; Williams, 1992), or "how to" approaches (Bytwerk, 1985; Dean, 1987; Preston, 1990; Reynolds & Fay, 1987) to the activity. While research has proven to be important in its contribution to the forensics community, it does not provide insight into the preferences of students involved in the activity. This study seeks to go beyond justifying or explaining "how to do" the event. Instead, this study examines competitor's preference in choosing quotations for analysis in the event of impromptu speaking.

According to Sellnow (1989, p. 7), more forensics research needs to focus on "what is actually taking place in the arena of competition." Logue and Shea (1989) argue that the aim of the forensic laboratory should be the improvement of students' abilities in the areas of research, analysis, and oral communication. This is the approach taken in this study. This approach to forensic research offers several advantages:

1. It increases our understanding of the event;
2. It evaluates the merit and the effectiveness of coaching strategies;
3. It allows the questioning of the decisions, made by tournament administrators, regarding the choice of quotations used at a particular tournament.

Purpose

This study is exploratory and descriptive in nature. The goal of this study is to answer the following questions:

1. Do forensic competitors display a preference for the type of quotations offered in competition?
2. Does topic choice make a difference in advancement to out-round competition?
3. Is gender a differentiating factor in the type of quotations chosen by impromptu speakers?

Method

To test the research questions, two studies were conducted at an invitational tournament at a large Midwestern university. The studies were conducted at the same tournament in subsequent years. Subjects of the first study were 62 impromptu competitors, 29 female and 33 male. Fifty-nine competitors participated in the second study, 29 female and 30 male.

To test student choice, the quotations for the tournament were divided into two groups. For the first study, the quotations were divided into cynical and non-cynical groups; for the second study, humorous and non-humorous. In both studies, every competitor received two quotations, one from each group. The quotations were designated "A" and "B". For the first study, "A" represented cynical, and "B" represented non-cynical. For the second study, humorous quotations were designated "A", non-humorous were designated "B". The competitor then chose one of these quotations on which to base his/her speech. The judge recorded the subjects' choices on the

master (speed) ballot. The judge returned the master ballot to the ballot table at the conclusion of the round.

There were 39 sets of quotations during the first study: one for each of the twelve preliminary sections during the three round tournament, as well as the two semi-final rounds and the final round. For the second study, 33 sets of quotations were utilized, one for each of the ten preliminary sections plus the two semi-finals and one final. Quotations were not duplicated. Quotations were of the same approximate length to control for any possible confounding variables between quotation length and student choice.

For both studies, data was compiled for each student to reflect his/her choices during the entire tournament. Frequencies were computed for those students advancing to out-rounds. If a judge did not indicate students' choices, then those students were dropped from the out-round analysis. However, those students' preferences recorded in other rounds were still included in the total tallies. The data were also tallied across gender, to assess male and female choices. The obtained data, presented in Tables 1-4, were then submitted to chi-square analysis.

Results

Chi-square analysis, presented in Table 5, revealed a significant difference for quotation preference in the first study [x^2 (1, n = 202) = 15.5248, $p < 0.05$]. "A" quotations comprised thirty-six percent of the 202 recorded choices while "B" quotations were made up 64%. For the second study, chi-square analysis also revealed a significant difference regarding quotation preference [x^2 (1, n = 182) = 4.30, $p < 0.05$]. Quotation "A"

comprised 42% of the 182 recorded choices, quotation "B" composed 58% of the total. The analysis for the second study is presented in Table 6.

Chi-square analysis, summarized in Table 7, revealed a significant difference for the out-round speakers in the first study [x^2 (1, n = 54) = 8.9629, $p < 0.05$]. Of the fifty-four total choices, speakers opted for "A" quotations 30% of the time and "B" quotations 70% of the time. For advancing speakers in the second study, chi-square analysis did not reveal a significant difference for quotation type [x^2 (1, n = 50) = 2.00, $p < 0.05$]. Furthermore, chi-square analysis of the adjusted advancing speakers also did not reveal a significant difference for quotation type [x^2 (1, n = 41) = 1.1951, $p < 0.05$]. Both the analysis of advancing speaker choices and of adjusted speaker choices in the second study are presented in Table 8.

Analysis of speaker choices with respect to gender in the first study did not reveal a significant difference [x^2 (1, n = 202) = 0.8408, $p < 0.05$]. Males chose "A" quotations 33% of the time, "B" quotations 67% of the time. Females opted for "A" quotations 40% of the time and "B" quotations 60%. Table 9 summarizes the chi-square analysis as well as the above percentages.

Finally, analysis of gender choices also did not reveal a significant difference in the second study [x^2 (1, n = 182) = 0.0577, $p < 0.05$]. Quotation "A" comprised 43% of male choices and 41% of female choices. Quotation "B" composed 57% of male choices and 59% of female choices. Chi-square analysis of gender choices in the second study is summarized in Table 10.

Discussion

These findings indicate that students appear to, when given the choice, have preference in the types of quotations they choose to analyze. Both of the studies indicate that when students are given dichotomous quotation choices, they will prefer one of those choices over the other. This finding is important for tournament administrators to consider. If the forensics laboratory is concerned with improving students' abilities to be analytical (Logue & Shea, 1989), then we want to offer them topics which will be preferable to the competitor. Using topics that students feel comfortable with will allow the judges to critique analysis more thoroughly on the ballot. This will allow students to learn more about analytical skills than the event provides for currently.

A second advantage to using preferable topics would be a possible increase in students involved in the activity. It is possible that students do not participate in impromptu speaking because the quotations chosen by tournament directors are unsavory to the competitor. This would lead to frustration of the students as they attempt to analyze a quotation that they do not appreciate.

The first study found topic choice as being an indicator of advancement to the final round. The second study did not confirm this finding, but may have been influenced by the three competitors whose choices had to be disregarded because the judge did not indicate their choices in the third round. The first study findings may indicate that the analysis of a topic that is preferable to the competitor allows for greater depth of analysis.

However, these findings may also indicate that judges have a preference in topics and this preference was shown in the rankings.

Finally, no significant differences were found when gender was considered a variable for topic choice. This may indicate that we are producing students who view analysis homogeneously. It may also indicate that the choices provided to the competitors did not include choices that would be preferable for a gender basis. It may also be considered that the competitors are coached by like methods without regard to the gender of the student.

Limitations and further research

A limitation of this study was that the subject of the quotations was not controlled for. That is, the set of quotations may have been cynical v. non-cynical, but it could have also concerned death v. travel. Thus, we may have an inaccurate assessment of choice.

Two possibilities for future research should be considered from this study. First, the underlying assumption in this study design was that quotation length may affect choice. This assumption should be tested. Second, choice may have been affected by expectation of others in the round. That is, some speakers take the "harder" of the two quotations thinking that no one else will. Or they may have disagreed with the quotation, thinking that no one else will. In short, they allow others to make the choice for them. A questionnaire of impromptu speakers may be able to explicate the prevalence of this practice.

Conclusion

This study has offered a new approach to the examination of impromptu speaking as a forensic event. It was found that competitors are likely to prefer one type of quotation over another. There is an indication that choice of quotations may influence ranking in the round of competition. No gender difference in preference was found. The authors argue that, in an attempt to create the most educational laboratory, tournament directors should be concerned with the choice of quotations they offer students.

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Table 1
Total recorded choices

Round	Study 1		Study 2	
	A	B	A	B
Preliminary 1	16	46	23	36
Preliminary 2	28	33	25	33
Preliminary 3	22	39	19	28
Semi-final 1	0	6	3	3
Semi-final 2	3	3	3	3
Final	4	2	4	2
Total	73	129	77	105
Grand Total	202		182	

Table 2
Advancing speaker choices, Study 1

Speaker	Preliminaries			Semi-finals	Final
	1	2	3		
Speaker 1	B	B	B	B	
Speaker 2	B	B	B	B	
Speaker 3	B	B	A	B	
Speaker 4	A	A	A	A	
Speaker 5	A	B	B	B	
Speaker 6	B	B	B	A	
Speaker 7	B	B	B	B	A
Speaker 8	B	A	B	A	B
Speaker 9	B	B	B	B	B
Speaker 10	A	B	A	B	A
Speaker 11	B	A	B	B	A
Speaker 12	B	A	B	B	A
Totals	9A; 27B			3A; 9B	4A; 2B
Grand Total	16 A 38 B				

Table 3
Advancing speaker choices, Study 2

Speaker	Preliminaries 1	2	3	Semi-finals	Final
Speaker 1	A	B	A	B	
Speaker 2	B	B	B	B	
Speaker 3	B	B	-*	A	
Speaker 4	A	-	-	A	
Speaker 5	B	B	B	B	
Speaker 6	B	B	B	A	
Speaker 7	B	B	-	B	B
Speaker 8	A	B	A	B	B
Speaker 9	A	B	B	A	A
Speaker 10	A	B	B	A	A
Speaker 11	B	B	A	A	A
Speaker 12	B	A	A	B	A
Totals	10 A; 22 B			6 A; 6 B	4 A; 2 B
Grand Total				20 A 30 B	
Adjusted Total**				17 A 24 B	

* (-) indicates that student choice was not recorded for this round of competition
** Adjusted total reflects total recorded choices after dropping speakers with incomplete choice records (Speakers 3, 4, and 7)

Table 4
Student choices by gender

	Male A	Male B	Female A	Female B	
Study 1	37	74	36	55	(n_m=33, n_f=29)
Study 2	41	54	36	51	(n_m=30, n_f=29)

Table 5
Analysis of total recorded choices, Study 1

	A	B	Total
Observed	73	129	202

x^2 (1, n = 202) = 15.5248, $p < 0.05$

Table 6
Analysis of total recorded choices, Study 2

	A	B	Total
Observed	77	105	182

x^2 (1, n = 182) = 4.30, $p < 0.05$

Table 7
Analysis of advancing speaker choices, Study 1

	A	B	Total
Observed	16	38	54

x^2 (1, n = 54) = 8.9629, $p < 0.05$

Table 8
Analysis of advancing speaker choices, Study 2

	A	B	Total
Observed	20	30	50

x^2 (1, n = 50) = 2.00,* $p < 0.05$

	A	B	Total
Adjusted observed	17	24	41

x^2 (1, n = 41) = 1.1951,* $p < 0.05$
* = not significant at $p < 0.05$

Table 9
Analysis of choices by gender, Study 1

	A	B	Total
Male observed	37	74	111
Female observed	36	55	91
Total observed			202

x^2 (1, n = 202) = 0.8408,* p < 0.05

Table 10
Analysis of choices by gender, Study 2

	A	B	Total
Male observed	41	54	95
Female observed	36	51	87
Total observed			182

x^2 (1, n = 202) = 0.0577,* p < 0.05

* = not significant at p < 0.05